

# THE CATHOLIC MIND

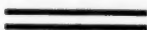
Vol. XXXVIII.

APRIL 22, 1940.

No. 896.

## Cremation: What Do You Know About It?

JAMES P. O'HARA



## The Legend of the Protestant Bible

GREGORY PARABLE



## The Oath and Perjury

REV. I. M. RODRIGUES

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JAMES P. O'HARA

*Reprinted from The Brooklyn Tablet*

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Even the subject of death and the disposal of the human remains has been penned in glowing terms, so much so that those in the business would have us believe that the sorrow and trials of losing someone beloved can be made pleasant through the medium of cremation.

Into everyone's life sorrow must come; death is no respecter of persons. The pangs of sorrow caused by the loss of one close and dear have been commonly felt by all. No matter what choice is made for the eventual disposal of the remains, and let every modern device of the mortician's art be brought into play, the pain of sorrow and sense of loss cannot be dispelled.

Throughout all Christian countries, the burial of the body in the earth has been a prevailing custom. Cremation has gained some popularity in recent years, but still does not, as yet, find favor with the general public.

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Throughout all Christian countries, the burial of the body in the earth has been a prevailing custom. Cremation has gained some popularity in recent years, but still does not, as yet, find favor with the general public.

### OPERATED FOR PROFIT

Those who own and operate crematories for profit are naturally interested in increasing their business.

It is their livelihood, and therefore the cremationists scoff at the idea of interment in the earth as being old-fashioned, and claim many advantages for the immediate destruction of the human remains by fire.

Direct advertising is difficult, as the subject is not one which is likely to find much popular appeal. Only in the Trade Journals do we find the advertisements which really tell the story.

### NO RED TAPE

For example, an outstanding Funeral Trade Journal recently carried a half-page advertisement informing undertakers of "A new source of Profit to the Funeral Directors—The cost of Cremation is moderate. Cremation does not compete with Funeral Directors in the sale of urns. A liberal commission is also paid on the sale of crematory niches, which many Funeral Directors have found to be a considerable item of profit in the course of a year. When you deal with us your interests are protected in every transaction—prompt, efficient service—no delays—no red tape."

The first contention made for cremation is that it is more efficient and cheaper for the family. Secondly, that cremation eliminates the necessity of large cemeteries, thus saving in congested areas space for real estate development, etc. Many other advantages and claims mostly of similar nature are made, and in fairness to them, we propose to take a careful analysis of what actually takes place when a body is cremated.

### CHECKING ON COSTS

As a general rule, the initial funeral cost, such as the selection of a casket, the clothing of the corpse, and all other expenses are the same whether the body is to be cremated or interred in the ground. The family

position and pride dictate the standard which is to be upheld. Primarily, because it is while the body is reposing during the period from death until final disposition of the remains takes place, the family wish to impress upon their friends and visitors their concern and sorrow for the deceased.

#### PREPARING ADVERTISING

Invariably articles dealing detrimentally with the earth burials, picture the cemetery on a day in mid-winter, and so we will select this kind of a day to follow a funeral cortege to the crematory. Immediately upon arrival, the casket is carried or wheeled into the reception room or chapel, followed by the chief mourners and friends, grateful, no doubt, that they are not to be exposed to the inclement weather for the few minutes which it would take to complete an interment in the earth by modern cemetery methods.

Inside the crematory every effort has been made to eliminate any suggestion of what is to happen. In fact many crematories have quite novel schemes of decorations. Beauty, like the reception room in a hospital.

After a brief interval, to permit a few words of consolation by the undertaker or minister, the body is ready for the retort. The entire procedure occupies ten to fifteen minutes.

#### INTO THE FURNACE

The actual placing of the body in the furnace is not seen by the mourners, but it does not need much imagination to realize that a beloved one is about to be consigned to immediate destruction by fire for the sake of efficiency, in the same manner as is used in the destruction of refuse. An imagination which can liken the destructive flame of an oil burner in a crematory to the light of God's sun, certainly should not have much difficulty in realizing the actual inhuman happening that is about to take place.

### THE OPERATION STARTS

It is interesting to investigate just what transpires after the mourners leave. The front of the furnace, and the door which is opened to receive the casket are similar to that of an ordinary large commercial oil burner. The vault-like chamber into which the casket is placed is ample enough to accommodate the largest type of modern casket.

Immediately the casket and remains are placed in the furnace, the oil flame is turned on, the work of destruction is started. The number of cremations which can take place at one time, is, of course, limited to the number of retorts in operation.

If there are more bodies to be disposed of on any particular day than retorts, the last bodies must wait at least six hours before disposal or twelve hours before the job is finished; therefore arrival at the crematory at 3 p. m. does not always mean immediate service, but rather, the body is left in a convenient place for the proper time.

### NOT EASILY DESTROYED

The human body is not easily destroyed. It is exposed to a temperature of about 2,400 Fahrenheit, and this intense heat takes almost two hours to reduce the corpse and casket to ashes.

When everything in the furnace is destroyed the flame is shut off. A cooling period of two to four hours must elapse before the ashes can be removed.

### SKULL AND LARGER BONES

Even after the body has been exposed to this heat, the skull and large bones retain their shape and form. When the flame is stopped these large intact parts are resting on the floor of the furnace like red hot coals. No doubt it is not a difficult task to reduce these stubborn portions to the proper size to fit into the urn.

These ashes consist now not only of the human re-



mains, but also particles of soot from the oil flame (since no oil flame is perfect), wood from the casket, cloth from the clothing, and particles of brick-dust from the fire-brick. Fire-bricks in an average furnace in a crematory are renewed frequently because of the intensity of the heat. Some crematories try to separate the human ashes by suction, but the degree of success, and the care exercised in this operation is questionable.

#### GATHERING UP THE ASHES

The ashes are gathered up (we might say, swept up) as there seems to be no other way to collect all particles, and placed in a receptacle, there to await their final disposal by the family.

Now we come to the part which is of vital importance to the crematory proprietors, and the stage is set for the "financial kill."

#### "THE FINANCIAL KILL"

Unless arrangements are made beforehand, the family is requested to make known the manner in which they wish the ashes disposed of: (in many crematories ashes not called for in a certain period of time are disposed of without ceremony). It will then be realized by the relatives that cremation is really a double funeral. First the harrowing ordeal of destruction of the body by fire, to be followed by the disposal of the ashes.

#### COMPARISON OF COSTS

The family must purchase an urn (price depending on the size and kind of material); in addition there is a place to be procured where the ashes may be kept.

There are niches in a columbarium for sale, prices also depending on size and location. If one desires, a burial plot may be obtained on easy payments, and the ashes interred.

Those in the crematory business realize, only too

well, that the majority of people have a natural respect for their dead, and if the family's financial position permits, the final resting place of the ashes will be decently taken care of. Naturally, the number of niches and spaces inside the average crematory is limited, so earthly burials or some other means must eventually prevail, if proper disposition of the ashes is to be made.

There certainly has been no lowering of cost, and the entire experience has not, in any manner, lightened the burden of sorrow. So we find that we eventually arrive back at earth burial after all.

#### EUROPEAN PROPAGANDA

The evidence of this is seen in many places in Europe, where cremation has made more progress. Cemeteries surrounding crematories are filled with expensive monuments which have been erected to honor the ashes which are interred in the ground.

In an article published some time ago, describing one of these crematories, we read: "The disposal of a body by fire does not preclude the erection of simple or elaborate monuments, either to mark the place of deposit of the ashes or to commemorate the one whose mortal remains have been transmuted by fire instead of slow decomposition. Already the sculptors and architects have been called into play to produce urns to contain the ashes and monuments to mark the place of their deposit, and the tendency is to make the ceremony and the commemorative signs more and more elaborate and expensive, although one of the principal claims of the disposition of the body by fire is that it may be made much less expensive than burial, without however sacrificing in any way either dignity or beauty."

#### DESTRUCTION COMPLETE

The destruction of the human remains by fire is complete, and no matter what claims may be made

afterwards, cremation has destroyed all signs of violence, traces of poison or injury, making examination impossible, whereas an autopsy is always possible after inhumation for some months. Does the practice of cremation conserve space? Who can answer this question? How or why does space become of such vital importance when we are dealing with our dead?

Everyone is aware that death is the surest thing in life, and all should realize that death is a part of life, though most of us refuse to recognize it. If we did the location of our burial places would receive the proper place in "Community Planning."

Is it not strange that with the countless millions of dead who have been buried in the bosom of Mother Earth, since the first days of creation, no real problem exists, and the world remains essentially the same. Surely, therefore, we must recognize a Divine plan, operating through the forces of nature, which brings about a balance between life and death. In fact today, in spite of all that has gone before, scientists co-operating with the natural order, are making life and living better and safer than ever before.

#### CONSIDER THE DETAILS

If all details are considered, there is no benefit for the family in cremation as a means of disposing of its dead. Costs over a period of time must necessarily be higher than earth burials, for with every cremated body a new niche and urn must be provided, and perhaps the additional expense of burial in a cemetery plot.

Whereas even a small burial plot, if properly used, may serve a family for several generations, there being undoubtedly a definite space of time between deaths in the average family, permitting natural decomposition, thereby providing additional space for burials, the only cemetery expense being the cost of opening the grave.

When we become callous and indifferent enough to permit the remains of our dead to be treated as we treat the refuse of our cities, then cremation will be really efficient and cheap. But the owners of crematories will not be interested then for there is little profit in the actual incineration.

It is the second funeral, the sale of the urn, niche and plot, which brings in the profits.

## The Legend of the Protestant Bible

GREGORY PARABLE

*Reprinted from The Advocate, Australia.*

**I**T is a Protestant, the reverend historian, J. H. Blunt, who has honestly stated that "there has been much wild and foolish writing about the scarcity of the Bible in the ages preceding the Reformation. It has been taken for granted that the Holy Scripture was almost a sealed book until it was printed in English by Tyndale and Coverdale, and that the only real source of knowledge respecting it before then was the translation made by Wycliffe." Such wild and foolish errors the reverend gentleman rejects, affirming, on the contrary, that "a modern Bible reader is astonished" at the "very free use" made of the Sacred Book in pre-Reformation times." But the error persists.

The "Matthew" or "Great Bible," sometimes called "Cranmer's," was a Protestant edition. It was the first complete Bible to be *printed* in England in the English tongue. It was issued by a man named Rogers, under the false name of Thomas Matthew. It was the Bible, under an alias, of two men named Tyndale and Coverdale. Its publication was a fraud, and the man responsible for it was Thomas Cromwell.

## THE LEGEND

It is said by the ignorant, and it is inferred by the dishonest, that until the publication of the Protestant Great Bible (save for the gallant effort of the "Reformer" Wycliffe in 1382) the Bible was kept from the English people. It is said also that in 1503 Luther, at the age of twenty, discovered the Bible chained and hidden. Its subsequent prompt and joyous printing, for the first time in the vernacular, or native tongue, by the "Reformers," and the attempts of Tyndale and Coverdale to smuggle it into England form the legend of Protestant heroism giving the Bible to the people.

A story which a Protestant Church Quarterly described as "ludicrous and grotesque."

The Bible is the Sacred Book of the Catholic Church. She, from the multitude of narrations, some false, some doubtful and some genuine, selected the authentic and by her authority fixed the "Canon." The very name "Vulgate," given to the great translation of Saint Jerome from the original into what then, and for a long time afterwards, was the common tongue, is proof of her desire to make available the Written Word. But not for misuse or garbling, for it was the Word of God.

## VERNACULAR VERSIONS

The Vulgate, the common Bible, was in Latin. But it could be read by most people who could read at all. Nevertheless, a list could be compiled of the manuscript versions written in the vernacular languages of Europe before the invention of printing, versions in Latin, Greek, Syriac, Egyptian, Abyssinian, Arabic, Persian, Armenian, Gothic, Slavonic, German, French, Flemish, Spanish, Anglo-Saxon, English, Irish, Italian, Icelandic, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Polish, Swedish, Bohemian, Portuguese, Moldavian, Tartar, Chinese. Blunt states that: "The laity who could read had abundant opportunity of reading the Bible, either in Latin or in English, up to the Reformation period." But

the most important testimony comes from Dr. Maitland, a Protestant, a scholar, librarian to the Archbishops of Canterbury, keeper of the MSS. at Lambeth, and recognized authority on the Canon Law of the Church of England. As the result of his extensive researches he could say: "I know of nothing which should lead me to suppose that any human craft or power was exercised to prevent the reading, the multiplication, the diffusion of the word of God" *The Dark Ages*.

In Germany, for instance, in the Middle Ages, there were at least fifty complete translations in the vernacular, not to mention the far more numerous partial versions. In England, the translators were at work as far back as the language can be traced. Among them, Saint Aidan (died 651), Caedman (680), the Venerable Bede (735), Alcuin (804), King Alfred (901), and Aelfric, Archbishop of Canterbury (994-1005), come easily to mind. We have the reliable testimony of Saint (Sir) Thomas More, Chancellor of England, that "the whole Bible was, long before his (Wycliffe's) days, by virtuous and well-learned men, translated into the English tongue, and by good and godly people, with devotion and soberness, well and reverently read."

If that is not sufficient, there is the testimony of none other than Cranmer, first Protestant Archbishop of Canterbury, who, in a preface to a second edition of the same Great Bible, wrote: "The Holy Bible was translated and read in the Saxon tongue, which at that time was our mother tongue, whereof there remaineth yet divers copies . . . and when this language waxed old and out of common use . . . It was again translated into the newer language, whereof yet also many copies remain and be daily found."

Perhaps more telling—considering the teller—is found in the Preface of the Protestant Authorized Version where the translators write: "The godly-learned were not content to have the Scriptures in the language which they themselves understood, Greek and

Latin . . . but also for the behoof and edifying of the unlearned . . . they provided translations into the Vulgar for their countrymen, insomuch that most nations under heaven did shortly after their conversion hear Christ speaking to them in their mother tongue, not by the word of their minister only but also by the written words translated."

Even such a noted twister of the truth as Foxe, the martyrologist wrote: "Both before the Conquest and after, as well as before John Wycliffe was born, as since, the whole body of the Scriptures was by sundry men translated into our country tongue" (Preface to Anglo-Saxon Gospels).

It should not be necessary to go further, but Wycliffe, Tyndale, Coverdale and Company are still juggled out of the showman's hat from time to time, and are likely to be produced again shortly, so it is well to have a look at them.

#### WYCLIFFE

The man, John Wycliffe, supposed to have been persecuted by the Church for translating the Bible into English in 1382, and therefore known in the legends as the "Morning Star of the Reformation," was a priest who got himself mixed up with the Lollards, a sort of fourteenth century Communist movement, which, like that of the Waldenses and Albigenses, was violently fanatical and revolutionary. Wycliffe undertook to make a translation of the Bible, a work for which he was in no way competent, and for the doing of which his motives were highly questionable. Weighty scholars deny, even, that he ever made a translation. However, Dore, an Anglican, writes that "he held views which, if carried into practice, would have been totally subversive of morality and good order." And Dean Hook, another Anglican, said: "It was not from hostility to a translated Bible . . . that the conduct of Wycliffe in translating it was condemned. Long before

his time there had been translations of Holy Writ. There is no reason to suppose that any objection would have been offered if the object of the translator had only been the edification and sanctification of the reader. It was not until the designs of the Lollards were discovered that Wycliffe's version was proscribed" *Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury*. In like manner writes Dr. Gardiner.

### THE ART OF PRINTING

The invention of printing in the middle of the fifteenth century revolutionized the world of books, and in consequence the world of men itself. But certain things must never be forgotten, even if our spinners of legends about the Protestant Bible forget them. From the first the Church was patron and promoter of printing. "In every country in Europe," says Jackson in his book on Wood-Engraving, "we find them (the monks) to have been the first to encourage and promote the new art." In England, Caxton practised his art in the Abbey at Westminster, and there were presses at Saint Augustine's Abbey at Canterbury, Saint Alban's Abbey, and other monasteries. The very printing terms that have come down to us and are in use today have largely their origin in this fact.

The Church took advantage of the new invention to multiply quickly copies of her Book, the Bible. The Rev. W. F. Moulton, a professor in the Wesleyan College, Richmond, Yorkshire, writes: "Of the Latin Bible alone, as many as ninety-one editions had been issued before the close of the fifteenth century. Within twenty years of the printing of Gutenberg's Bible, 1455, the invention had found a home in more than a hundred European cities, and by the end of the century more than a thousand presses were at work. The Continental presses, almost in the earliest years of their existence, teem with editions of the Bible in different languages. Before 1477, four editions of the German Bible had



been given to the world; ten more were issued during the forty years which followed" *History of the English Bible*.

At the South Kensington Exhibition in 1877, the catalogue listed nine German editions earlier than 1483, the year of Luther's birth. A description of a Luther Exhibition in the British Museum in 1883 notes: "By 1507 . . . there had been thirteen editions of a translation of the Vulgate into German, and others in other modern languages. . . . Among the most interesting additions, the latest made is a nearly complete set of fourteen grand old pre-Luther German Bibles, 1460-1580."

So much for Luther and his discovery of the Bible.

#### TYNDALE

We now come to England.

So far no complete *printed* Bible in English had been issued. We may consider that the English ecclesiastical authorities were dilatory by lagging behind their brethren in other lands, and not providing a vernacular edition, but they had in mind an English printed edition, and in 1530 Archbishop Warham presided over an assembly to consider the matter. A commission formed to promote the work of translation consisted of the ecclesiastics, Warham and Tunstall, and the layman, Sir Thomas More. We must remember that lack of a printed English edition meant in nowise that those who wanted to read the Bible could not do so. Most readers could read the Vulgate. Nor was there, contrary to the legend, any popular clamor. According to Dore, "there was no anxiety whatever for an English version, excepting among a small minority of the people." Dr. Brewer, another Protestant, and an editor, along with Dr. Gardiner, of the official Letters and Papers issued by the Records Office, scoffs at the idea that "ploughmen and shepherds in the country read the New Testament by stealth, or that smiths

and carpenters in towns pored over its pages in the corner of their masters' workshops." Moreover, the printed Bible was costly, and out of reach of the ordinary man's pocket.

William Tyndale, a priest caught up by the extravagant errors of the time, was obsessed by the ambition to undertake a translation of the Scriptures—a work for which he was, like Wycliffe before him, unfitted. The Bishops were prudent about setting in hand a new translation, since there were, on every hand, as Cranmer himself said, "idle babblers and talkers of the Scripture, out of season and of all good order, and without any increase of virtue, of example, or of good living." Of these Tyndale was one. Learned Protestant testimony condemns him. According to Blunt, "his manner of writing about sacred subjects is often inexpressibly shocking. How such a man came to undertake the translation of the New Testament is one of the problems of the Reformation age." Again: "He was also of a very cankered and bitter temper, which led him to fill his pages with abusive language, even when writing on the most sacred subjects. His language respecting the latter was often so shocking, and at the same time so utterly illogical, that it led Sir Thomas More to stigmatize him as a 'blasphemous fool.'" Elsewhere Blunt speaks of "such ribald books as Tyndale's," and the Anglican historian, Bishop Collier, says that "he failed both in truth and in decency in several material points" (*Eccl. Hist.*, Vol. IV).

What Tyndale aimed at publishing was not so much the Bible. Canon Dixon sums up the matter in his *History of the Church of England*, Vol. I: "Every one of the little volumes containing portions of the Sacred Text that was issued by Tyndale contained also a prologue and notes written with . . . a hot fury of vituperation." Blunt, referring to the Bishop's condemnation of Tyndale's work, writes: "There was much justification for this in the 'prologues,' the 'glosses,' and the

false renderings of Tyndale's translation (the first part alone occupying as much space as the translation itself) . . . In some editions of Tyndale's New Testament there is what must be regarded as *wilful* omissions of the gravest possible character, for . . . it has no shadow of justification in the Greek or Latin of the passage." *Reformation*, Vol. I.

Now, the interesting point is that Henry VIII and his Council condemned "the translation of the Scripture corrupted by William Tyndale." An Act prohibited "all manner of books of the Old and New Testament in English, being of the *crafty, false, and untrue translation of Tyndale*." It further declared that they "shall be clearly and utterly abolished, extinguished and forbidden to be kept or used in this realm." This from Henry as head of the Church of England. Tyndale's text was banished. But what happened?

#### THE MATTHEW BIBLE

Thomas Cromwell, infamous and notorious, Henry's Vicar-General, wanted Tyndale's book. It suited his purpose, but both Tyndale himself and his wilful mis-translation were odious to the King. In 1534 Cranmer induced Convocation to petition for another English version, and in 1535 Cromwell entrusted Coverdale with the work. Coverdale had worked with Tyndale and had published translations based upon his work. With them also was associated a man named Rogers. Though Coverdale's translation was licensed by the King in 1537, Cranmer sent to Cromwell a little later another translation which he thought the better. It had been prepared by Rogers, who, says the Protestant historian, Pollard, "had been entrusted by Tyndale with the manuscript of his incomplete translation of the Bible, including the whole of the New Testament and the Old as far as Jonah; he incorporated all the former, and the latter as far as the second book of Chronicles; the rest he borrowed from Coverdale." Cranmer,

*Heroes of the Reformation.* This supposedly new translation, a mere device, being Tyndale's presented by Rogers under the forged name of Thomas Matthew, so as to deceive the King, was approved. In the words of Pollard, who has no leaning to the Catholic view: "So the 'mischievous perversion' of the heretic . . . went forth with Cranmer's blessing . . . and Tyndale's translation, which had before been condemned, received now the sanction of authority, and permeated all future versions of the Bible in English." In 1538 Cromwell issued a set of Injunctions ordering that a copy of this Bible, the Great Bible, be set up in every church. This from Thomas Cromwell, who, according to Dr. Maitland, "was the great patron of the ribaldry, and the protector of the ribalds, of the low jester, the filthy ballad-monger, the ale-house singers, and the hypocritical religious gatherings—in short, of all the blasphemous, mocking and scoffing which disgraced the Protestant party at the time of the Reformation." *Reformation.*

In 1560 appeared the Genevan Bible, or *Breeches Bible*. In 1568 another version provided by Parker, Elizabeth's Archbishop of Canterbury, and known as the *Bishop's Bible*, took chief place in the service of the Church of England.

But that was not the end of the riot. The texts of these Bibles of Tyndale, Coverdale, Rogers—alias Matthew—and of Elizabeth's Bishops, were so obviously corrupt that zealous Protestants cried out against them. King James affirmed that "he could never see a Bible well translated into English at all," and therefore he ordered a fresh attempt. In 1611 appeared the Authorized Version—the product of the Protestant conviction that previous Protestant versions of the reign of Henry and Elizabeth were corrupt. In its turn the Authorized Version was reckoned frequently unsound, and last century saw the production of a "Revised Version."

Nevertheless, the Great Bible, the Matthew Bible, the cunning concoction of Tyndale, Coverdale, Rogers, Cromwell and Cranmer, as fine a set of artful dodgers and corrupters of the Sacred Text as could be hunted up anywhere, was commemorated as the "Gift of the Reformation to the English people."

## The Oath and Perjury

REV. I. M. RODRIGUES

*Reprinted from The Examiner, India.*

THE First Commandment, which obliges us to honor God in a becoming manner, necessarily contains what is said in the Second, because He Who wishes that we should adore and love Him, undoubtedly wishes that we should speak of Him with the greatest respect, and expressly forbids the contrary. Like the First, the Second Commandment is wholly for our advantage: it is the safeguard of the respect which we owe to God. The Second Commandment treats, therefore, of honoring and dishonoring the name of God by word; that is to say, it commands us to honor and forbids us to dishonor His Holy Name. One can honor and dishonor the Name of God in four ways—but I have selected swearing and perjury for my theme.

Swearing, or, to speak more correctly, taking an oath is an excellent manner of honoring the name of God. To take an oath is to call God to witness to the truth of what is asserted. Now, to call God to witness is to acknowledge that He knows all things, that He is incapable of lying, that He is Truth itself and defender of truth and avenger of falsehood. This is, therefore, to honor God with a supreme worship. Hence, in the Old as well as in the New Testament, we see the holiest personages making use of oaths. God Himself, to strengthen our confidence, does not disdain to have re-

course to them and He even encourages us saying: "You shall fear the Lord your God and you shall swear by His name."

To swear an oath, it is not necessary to invoke God Himself as a witness. A true oath is taken as often as the Holy Gospels, the Cross, the Saints or their relics or names, etc., are thus invoked. These objects do not give any authority of themselves to what is said but it comes from God, Whose Majesty and Sanctity appear in them.

Good in itself and honorable to God, the oath is also useful to men. There are many things of great importance to individuals, to families, to society, which cannot be affirmed with sufficient emphasis on human testimony alone. This for two reasons: one, a want of truthfulness, considering that a large number of persons are wont to tell lies; the other, a want of knowledge, considering that man cannot know the secrets of hearts, nor things to come, nor things remote. Yet, we often speak of things of this nature, and we often require to have a certain knowledge of them. To procure it, to put an end to disputes and to adjust a variety of interests, it has been found necessary to have recourse to the testimony of God, Who can neither deceive nor be deceived.

Though the manner of honoring God by taking an oath is good and useful, the frequent use of it is not laudable. "Accustom not thy mouth to oaths," says Holy Scripture, "this habit draws many evils." Saint Augustine and Saint Hilary observe that Saint Paul by making use of an oath in his Epistles shows us how we are to understand the injunction of Our Lord, "I say to you not to swear at all." Not that to swear is wrong but lest one should acquire a habit of it, and so fall into perjury.

Reason itself condemns this habit. What, in point of fact, is an oath? A remedy against human fallibility, a necessary means of proving what is asserted.

Now, remedies are useful only in case of necessity—hence, it is not advantageous to swear unless grave reasons require it, because, as the proverb runs: a great swearer, a great liar. The Fathers of the Church remark that the use of oaths cannot be traced back to the beginning of the world. It was introduced at a much later period, when the malice of men had increased and was spread throughout the earth. Corruption and perfidy had arrived at such a height that men, being no longer able to trust one another, were obliged to call God to witness to the truth of what they said.

An oath being such a serious thing, all should know the conditions required that it may be lawful and holy. They are three in number: "You shall swear with truth, with judgment, and with justice" (Jer. iv, 2).

To swear with truth, it is necessary to swear only when attesting what is true, what one knows for certain and not from mere guesses. They, therefore, become guilty of one of the greatest sins that can be committed who affirm on oath things which they know to be false or which they do not know to be true.

To swear with judgment it is necessary to avoid rashness and levity, to swear with discernment and after serious reflection. Hence, only the importance and necessity of what is sworn to can render it lawful to take an oath. If a man swears without weighing all things carefully his oath is rash and precipitate.

To swear with justice it is necessary that what one promises with an oath should be just and honest. If a man promises on oath a thing that is unjust or dishonest, such a promise does not in any manner bind as no one can be bound to do wrong. Thus, Herod was not excused by the oath which he had taken from the guilt of Saint John the Baptist's execution. Therefore, one who utters an oath in confirmation of a promise should be sure that the promise contains nothing,

obliges to nothing contrary to the Commandments of God or the Church.

An oath, taken with the requisite conditions, imposes a serious obligation—grounded on the virtues of religion and justice—to fulfil, in all their extent, the duties contracted by it. And this obligation cannot be limited by any mental or inward reservation, but only by a reservation clearly and explicitly shown.

If to swear with truth, with judgment and with justice is an act which honors the name of God, to perjure oneself is an act which greatly dishonors His Holy Name. In effect perjury is a lie confirmed with an oath. Now, he who dares to call God to witness to a falsehood does Him a monstrous injury. He seems to accuse God of ignorance as if God could be ignorant of any truth or of wickedness as if God could confirm a lie with His approbation. There is no levity of matter here. It is a mortal sin to swear in support of a lie—however small.

Perjury is also a social crime. That society may exist it is necessary that man should be able to trust his fellow men, to believe their word. This conviction is the basis of all contracts. But covetousness may lead men to deceive others. To remedy this evil God permits an oath: it is the highest guarantee of man's promises. Take away oaths from society, let perjury be no longer a crime—in other words, efface the second precept of the Decalogue—and you dissolve society. So true is this that among Romans perjury was declared infamous and the laws of most nations punish it severely.



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